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WAR FOOD ADMINISTRATION

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WASHINGTON, D. C.

Subject Matter

Isolation of Vitamin B₁ (Thiamin) by Dr. R. R. Williams

Type of Presentation

Historical Drama

Approximate Length

Fifteen Mihutes

Source

"LISTEN AMERICA"

(Women's National Emergency Committee and NBC)

ANNOUNCER: Tonight we shall hear the epic story of Dr. Williams, the man who first isolated Vitamin B₁ and then found a way to produce it artificially in unlimited amounts for our use.

(MUSIC)

This epic

(FILIPINO STREET SOUNDS SNEAKING IN)

(MUSIC FADING OUT)

.....Begins in the Philippines in 1910.

WILLIAMS: (FADING IN) (YOUNG) But I don't see, Captain Vedder, why you brought me down to the slums of Manila to talk about my future.

VEDDER: Williams, my boy, you're young, a fine chemist, but how much do you know about beri-beri?

WILLIAMS: Too much. I saw its tortured victims when I was a child in India. A terrible disease — well, why wave that brown vial in front of me?

VEDDER: Remember Eijkman's experiments in Java?

WILLIAMS: When he found that something in the husks of rice prevented beri-beri — Sure.

VEDDER: Well, this brown mess is a solution made from such rice husks. Somewhere in this solution is hid the way to free millions of that fear of miserable agony and death. But what is this X?

(NOISE OF NATIVE WAILINGS AND NATIVE

REEDS SLOWLY FADE IN)

That's the spare time job I want you to take on.

WILLIAMS: Sweating, trying to isolate some tiny mysterious X from all that dark brown gaummy mess! — And Eijkman may have been wrong all the time! No thanks, Vedder, not on your tintype!

(WAILING REEDS IN)

Why stop in front of this squalid hut?

VEDDER: You'll see — go on, and (FADING) take the vial with you.
I'll wait here.

SOUND: (WAILING ON STAGE) (CHILD'S MISERABLE GURGLING)
(WAILS ON MIKE

MIRAMORI: My baby, my baby she suffers. Oh, great spirit — be kind.
My baby's bones are a fire of hurt — aie---

WILLIAMS: What is it? What's the matter?

2ND NATIVE: (OLD) Miramori's husband die. Now her baby die too.
Beri-beri too great. It is the "I cannot" disease —

WILLIAMS: "I cannot" disease — beri-beri, eh? The poor woman....

1ST NATIVE: (PHILOSOPHICALLY) The witch doctor and the white doctor, they
cannot struggle against the gods. (BABY'S GURGLING WAIL HALF
ON MIKE AND STOPS SHORT) (WAILING REDOUBLED) (SHRIEKS FROM
MIRAMORI)

MIRAMORI: Aie — my baby is unconscious, dying — aie--(REACTION)

WILLIAMS: (OVER NOISE) Wait a--stop it. Look, Miramori — may I
dream a spell around your child?

MIRAMORI: Can you — can you tear it from the grasp of the gods?

WILLIAMS: I fear not, but I shall try. Hand me the child.

(SOFT MUTTERINGS FROM NATIVES - NO WAILING)

And — stop that music!

(OFFSTAGE MUSIC OUT)

My spell is in this vial. Miramori, hold your baby's mouth
open — (NATIVES GET QUIET) — Now — (UNCORKS VIAL)

I pour one — two — three drops down her throat..

(MORE)

WILLIAMS: (REACTION) Oh....shade of Dr. Eijkman, be right ... be right
(CONT)
about rice husks.

MIRAMORI: What now, great doctor —

WILLIAMS: Now we wait and pray —

(QUICK MUSIC BRIDGE)

(REEDS OFFSTAGE AND SOFT WAILING)

WILLIAMS: So that's why you brought me down into these slums, eh?

VEDDER: It's an experiment worth trying.

WILLIAMS: Well, it's only three hours since I gave the child the
stuff — but what's the use, it —

(WAILING AND REEDS STOP...COMMOTION)

OFFSTAGE....BABBLE)

MIRAMORI: What's that??? (RUSHING IN) Oh, great doctor — my life
is yours — See, my baby she is conscious — see — she
reaches for you — (GURGLE OF BABY ON MIKE)

VEDDER: (AWED) It can't be — three hours ago, the child was dying —

WILLIAMS: (AWED) Just a few drops of a sweetish sticky dark brown mess —
not a germ, not an antidote, not an antitoxin — You win,
Vedder, I've got a spare time job all right — somehow, I'll
isolate from that vial its magic — the — the spark of the
angels!

(MUSIC AND DOWN INTO MONTAGE HURRY UP MUSIC)

(VOICES ALWAYS FILTERED, MONOTONOUS AND FAST)

VOICE I: 1911 —

VOICE II: William Howard Taft —

VOICE III: The Panama Canal —

ALL THREE: (ACCUSING WILLIAMS, EACH TIME MORE RAUCOUS) 1911!

WILLIAMS: (ALWAYS DIRECTLY ANSWERING THE FILTERS) (JAUNTILY, WITH GREAT CONFIDENCE) It wouldn't be a job worth doing if I could isolate that in a year! Take a little patience!

(QUICK MUSIC BULGE)

VOICE I: 1916 --

VOICE II: Woodrow Wilson --

VOICE III: The Lusitania --

ALL: 1916 !!

WILLIAMS: (APOLOGETIC) Six years isn't very long, when you can only work nights and Saturdays. But I'll track it down -- any day now --

(MUSIC BULGE)

VOICE I:: 1925 --

VOICE II: Calvin Coolidge --

VOICE III: Boom times --

ALL: 1925 !!

WILLIAMS: (WEARILY) All right, all right, I know -- fourteen years wasted filtering and measuring and straining -- searching for that mysterious something in rice husks. (ANGRILY) But never mind worrying about how much time I spend at this. Worry about all those humans who've died of beri-beri because I've been so slow.

(MUSIC BULGE)

VOICE I: 1931 --

VOICE II: Falling prices --

VOICE III: The Depression --

ALL: 1931 !!!

WILLIAMS: (WAVING IT ASIDE) Sure, sure, it's been twenty years, but
 I've just heard some good news. The Bell Laboratories where
 I work will be open only four days a week 'till business
 picks up. Now I'll have all day Friday and Saturday to get
 at this. Now we'll find it!

(MUSIC BULGE.....AND OUT UNDER)

VOICE I: Nineteen

VOICE II: Thirty —

VOICE III: Three —

ALL: 1933!!!!

(FADE IN BUNSEN BURNER...TEST TUBES....

INSTRUMENTS ON MARBLE SHELF, ETC.)

(AD LIB UNDER)

WILLIAMS: Twenty-three years, Waterman —

WATERMAN: And heaven knows how many thousand experiments —

WILLIAMS: Oh, well, let's get on with this test — Pour off the
 alcohol. (GURGLE) There, now you hold the dish and I'll
 pour in the extract (SPLASH LIQUID INTO SHALLOW DISH)
 Now the dryer. (CLICK.....HUM MOTOR....BLAST HOT AIR)

WATERMAN: (CASUALLY) Wonder if anything'll show up this time —

(PAUSE)

WILLIAMS: Look -- is it -- it's actually beginning to crystalize —

WATERMAN: Long white needles, growing while we watch — and lots of
 them!

WILLIAMS: Look — yes — Waterman, it's the white rosettes — white
 rosettes at last. Like snow crystals caught in a dream —
 hundreds of them — turn off the dryer (CLICK, SOUND OUT)

(MORE)

WILLIAMS: I'm afraid they'll vanish in front of me.

(CONT)

WATERMAN: (STILL HARDLY BELIEVING) It doesn't seem believable —
the problem all solved — spare time for us at last —

WILLIAMS: (ENTHUSIASTIC) And how we'll need it! . .

WATERMAN: What?

WILLIAMS: Sure, now we can really go to work. Now that we know how to
isolate enough vitamin B₁, we can begin analyzing it. Just
another two or three years —

WATERMAN: Or another twenty-three...

WILLIAMS: All right, twenty-three and we'll get the chemical formula
for these white needles..Then we'll really know what it is -
and then...(MUSIC SNEAKING IN) Then we can make unlimited
vitamin B₁, enough for every beri-beri victim — (ALMOST
DREAMING OF IT) — the spark of the angels for all the world.

(MUSIC: MERLE BIG VICTORY)

(APPLAUSE)

ANNOUNCER: Thank you for your stirring portrayal of Dr. Robert Williams,
whose achievement has already had such tremendous consequences.
For it was Williams' discovery which has made possible the
enrichment of white bread and white flour with Vitamin B₁.
The epic accomplishments of the great hunger fighters help make
us all realize how crucially important to our lives is the right
diet. The recent work of the Nutritional Conference at
Washington emphasized the necessity for a gigantic increase -
an increase of millions of acres - in the land our farmers
now devote to dairy products and all the productive foods,

(MORE)

ANNOUNCER: rich in vitamins and minerals and good proteins. I know
 (CONT) farmers will be glad to increase their production of these
 foods. They have the land, the machinery and the organization
 to do it. All they ask is a fair return for their labor and
 this, I know also, the country will want them to have. And
 everyone of you listening in tonight can take advantage of
 the great blessings of modern nutrition science. Yes, you
 can do this if you will eat the foods you should—follows
 the rules of good nutrition, prepared for your guidance by
 the greatest nutrition scientists in the world.
 Listen, to the Three Golden Rules of Nutrition.

(ORCHESTRA....FANFARE)

GOLDEN RULE NO. 1 A sound foundation for buoyant health can
 be built with seven ordinary foods....

VOICE 1: These foods are milk - meat - seafood - eggs - green vegeta-
 bles - fruit - and, finally, bread with adequate vitamins in
 it.

ANNOUNCER: GOLDEN RULE NO. 2 As far as you possibly can, see to it
 that every day you eat, at least.....

VOICE 1: A Pint of milk....

ANNOUNCER: So as to get some Vitamin A, some of the B vitamins, good
 proteins, and plenty of calcium.

VOICE 1: Enriched bread or biscuits, or whole grain cereals, or
whole wheat bread - and enriched flour whenever you use
white flour for cooking purposes.

ANNOUNCER: So as to get B vitamins, and minerals.

VOICE 1: A tomato, an orange, a grapefruit, or their juices.

ANNOUNCER: So as to get plenty of Vitamin C.

VOICE 1: A big helping of green leafy vegetables, and sometimes yellow ones - raw or lightly cooked.

ANNOUNCER: So as to get more Vitamin C, more vitamin A and minerals.

VOICE 1: Eggs, or lean meat, or seafood.

ANNOUNCER: So as to get more proteins, several B vitamins, and iron.

VOICE 1: And, finally, an apple, a peach, a pear, or other fruits in season.

ANNOUNCER: So as to get added minerals and vitamins.

ANNOUNCER: GOLDEN RULE NO. 3

VOICE 1: Then — eat anything else you like, unless, of course, your doctor has you on a special diet.

(MUSIC.....VIGOROUS - IN AND UNDER)

ANNOUNCER: There they are - simple, aren't they? In these few common foods are all the life-giving elements for buoyant health and strength. Milk, meat, seafood, eggs, vegetables and fruits are generally available and at low prices. Constant progress is being made in producing our more nutritious and less expensive food. And the new enriched flour and bread restores bread to its time honored place as a basic part of the diet.

(MUSIC.....OUT)

And don't forget that when you eat these foods you can still eat all your other favorite foods, and you will be following the road to buoyant health and the greater joy of life.

(MORE)

(MUSIC.....THEME)

ANNOUNCER: Food will win the war and write the peace. So in the years
(CONT)
of reconstruction, America must be the bread basket of the
world — a bread basket that contains all the foods necessary
to give our people the nourishment they need. With this
immeasurable power in our hands, we here in America can help
the shattered people of the world to put on strength and
those who have been cast down to mount on wings as eagles.
To these ends, all of us should rededicate ourselves.

(THEME UP)

